

State of Connecticut

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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Testimony of
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The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Labor and Public Employees Committee
Tuesday, February 1, 2005

In Support of:

HB 5398, AA Guaranteeing Full-Time Employees At Least Seven Paid Sick Days Per Year

HB 6228, AA Increasing the Minimum Wage

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Rep. Ryan and members of the Committee. My name is Natasha Pierre and I am the Associate Legislative Analyst for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of HB 5398, AA Guaranteeing Full-Time Employees At Least Seven Paid Sick Days Per Year and HB 6228, AA Increasing the Minimum Wage.

HB 5398, AA Guaranteeing Full-Time Employees At Least Seven Paid Sick Days Per Year

As you are aware, the PCSW has long supported paid family and medical leave proposals, including paid sick leave. Paid sick leave is crucial to a productive work environment. It allows employees to recover from short-term illnesses and injuries that would otherwise hamper their productivity if they were to attend work. However, nearly half of all private sector workers (47%)

have *no* paid sick time¹, with a total of 89 million workers in the U.S. having fewer than 7 days of paid sick leave.² This is a problem not only for employees, but also for their co-workers, employers and families.

When ill, those workers with no paid sick leave must decide whether to go to work ill or take unauthorized time off without pay, which may result in the termination of their job. The U.S. Department of Labor conducted a national survey in 2000 and found that more than three in four employees who needed but did not take leave cited lost wages as the primary reason.³ This has resulted in a phenomenon known as “presenteeism”. That is, employees are going to work ill and are not only unable to perform at their usual level of productivity, but they also risk spreading their illness to co-workers. In fact, 44 percent of corporate human resource executives say that “presenteeism” is a problem in their companies.⁴

All workers are subject to the occasional illness, and all will require time off for routine medical care. The loss of income and possible job loss resulting from inadequate paid sick leave has a domino effect on our families. Three of every four poor mothers who miss work to care for sick children receive no wages while off work.⁵ Often, this results in the need for welfare or other forms of public assistance.

Paid sick leave is an essential health care policy for all businesses. Employers’ efficiency is raised when healthy workers are able to perform at their highest levels of productivity. The value of lost productivity of workers who are on the job when not fully healthy is greater than the combined cost of employee absence and health and disability benefits.⁶ HB 5398, AA Guaranteeing Full-Time Employees At Least Seven Paid Sick Days Per Year will benefit Connecticut businesses and families.

¹ Vicki Lovell, *No Time To Be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers When Workers Don’t have Paid Sick Leave*, Institute for Women’s Policy Research, June 2004, p. 1.

² Institute for Women’s Policy Research, Fact Sheet: Expanded Sick Leave Would Yield Substantial Benefits to Business, Employers, and Families, 2004.

³ National Partnership for Women & Families, *Family Leave for More Family Needs* fact sheet, available at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org>.

⁴ National Partnership for Women and Families, *Get Well Soon: Americans Can’t Afford to Be Sick*, June 2004, p. 3, as derived from CCH Incorporated, *2003 CCH Unscheduled Absence Survey*, October 2003.

⁵ Vicki Lovell, *No Time To Be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers When Workers Don’t have Paid Sick Leave*, Institute for Women’s Policy Research, June 2004, p. 5, as derived from Wyn, Ojeda, Ranji, and Salganicoff 2003.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

HB 6228, AA Increasing the Minimum Wage

The PCSW supports an increase in minimum wage to not less than \$8.00. We also support the concept of indexing so that workers can feel confident that their wages will keep pace with the real cost of living without legislative action every year- just as the wages of many employees who are not at the minimum wage level are automatically adjusted in the form of “cost-of-living adjustments.”

The current minimum wage is \$7.10 per hour, which leads to an annual income for a full-time worker of approximately \$14,768 per year. This leaves a full time worker very close to the federal poverty level for a family of three. It is also approximately \$18,000 less per year than what a family of three in Hartford needs to earn to be self-sufficient.⁷

Increasing the minimum wage to keep pace with inflation is fair, and it would also have a significant impact on the economic security of women and all low and moderate wage workers. As you may know, two thirds of minimum wage workers are women, and 85% of them are adults, not teens entering the workforce. The majority of new workers who are former recipients of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) are also women – most of whom are working at or near the minimum wage. If we want workers to succeed, and to be able to support themselves and their families, then we have to create a realistic floor on wages-not one that leaves working adults and their children at or below poverty.

We thank you for your attention and urge your support of these proposals.

⁷ Diana Pearce, Ph.D. with Jennifer Brooks, *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Connecticut*, Fall, 1999, p. 59. A family of three- one adult, one infant, and one school age child- must earn \$15.83 an hour to be self-sufficient in the Hartford Region.

